Barrington (S.)
A Theology vol. 101
114 b 3/2

A CHARGE,

DELIVERED TO THE

CLERGY

OF THE

DIOCESE OF DURHAM;

AT THE

ORDINARY VISITATION

OF THAT

DIOCESE,

IN THE YEAR MDCC XCVII.

BY

SHUTE, BISHOP OF DURHAM.

London:

PRINTED BY T. RICKABY;

AND SOLD BY

T. PAYNE, CADELL AND DAVIES, F. AND C. RIVINGTON, AND P. ELMSLY, LONDON; FLETCHER AND COOK, OXFORD; DEIGHTON, CAMBRIDGE; AND THE BOOKSELLERS AT DURHAM, AND NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE.

1797.

TO

THE CLERGY

OF THE DIOCESE OF DURHAM.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

THE subjects, which I have proposed to your consideration in the following Charge, are among those which come nearest to my heart. Your unanimous approbation of the Charge, is a proof, which cannot but be very gratifying to my feelings, that its views and motives meet with your concurrence.

May the God of truth and goodneſs give us grace to unite our best endeavours in the support

port and advancement of that cause, in which all ranks and descriptions of men are so deeply interested, and which I have laboured to recommend, the cause of religious truth, and Christian charity!

What I have printed at your request, I wish you to accept as a public testimony of the real regard and esteem, with which I am,

Your affectionate friend,

And brother,

S. DUNELM.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

I. SINCE we last met, a period has elapsed, marked with a series of very momentous events; some of which most intimately affect the interests of the Christian Church, and involve in it that, of which it is the guardian, the welfare of Christianity. Whatever may be the final issue of the great conflict which has agitated Europe, there are some awful lessons to be read in it, which it becomes us to convert to our good. In the convulsion which has subverted the ancient government of France, we have seen the powerful holds which Christianity has upon society, violently burst asunder, its principles abandoned, its ordinances abolished, its very name renounced. I will not enter into the painful detail of the circumstances to which I allude, and which must have been too powerfully impressed upon your minds, to render it necessary to recall them to your recollection. It may be more useful, as it is certainly more pertinent to the occasion of our meeting, to inquire how it has happened, with all the advantages of learning and piety which have been brought to the support

Revelation, by the most able advocates within the last century and a half; with all the accumulated light of the present day, that Scepticism and Infidelity, those engines of anarchy, which have torn up the foundations of society in other countries, should, even in this country, and of late years, to all appearance have increased, rather than diminished.

I will not refer it to the manners, the luxury, or the licentiousness of the times; because, whatever may be ascribed to their influence, (and happy would it be if we could deny their influence) yet such causes have been too general in all periods of the Gospel, since the primitive ages, and, therefore, are too unappropriate for the effects in question. I would rather bring the inquiry home to the bosom of every individual, and appeal to him, after what I shall suggest, whether the consequences which we have to lament, are not more owing to an almost universal lukewarmness and indifference in Christians, respecting the essentials of their religion, the peculiar grounds of their faith, of their hopes, and their fears, than to the ability, the arguments, the zeal, or even the perseverance, of the enemies of Christianity.

II. In the corruption and depravity of human nature, are founded all the peculiar precepts and doctrines of the Gospel. It is there we may find the surest evidence of its truth. But it is an evidence so repugnant to the pride of self, of nature, and of natural reason, that conviction can be expected from nothing less than the most diligent study of God's word, and the assistance of his grace. Yet the fall of man, and the general corruption of man's nature, is pressed upon us by such proofs, from past and present experience, as afford to any one, who is sincerely anxious to make his calling and salvation sure, abundant grounds for looking beyond his own species for the means of reconciliation with his offended Maker. We know that (A) a very enlightened Heathen expressed his persuasion of the absolute incapacity of man's nature, in itself, to discern its own true good, and an earnest expectation of some Divine Agent to instruct mankind, and bring them to the knowledge of the truth. But the self-satisfied Pharisee saw no traces of human depravity in the multitude of his own merits; the vain disputatious philosopher discovers no symptoms of deep and radical corruption in the dignity of his own attainments; the hardened voluptuary, and the unthinking formalist, feel no wish for improvement in the torpid composure, the deadly insensibility of their conscience. An ignorance of

their

their want of a Redeemer, renders them incapable of such wishes, and impenetrable to such convictions. The fullest proof that the history of the world, or the lives of individuals, can exhibit of moral depravity, will never convince them of the fall of man, and the consequent necessity of redemption, if the sure principle of that great truth does not originate in their own minds. But let their minds be once awakened by any of God's saving providences, let them carry these impressions to the external evidences of the Gospel, and they will perceive such a correspondence between the light of these evidences, and the conviction resulting from their own feelings, as will leave no hesitation in their judgments, that as all mankind have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, nothing less than Divine Revelation could teach man the (B) pure will of God; nothing but some signal atonement could restore to him the lost image of his Maker. Let such compare their convictions, drawn from these infallible sources, with the evidences of Christianity from prophecy, from miracles, from the life of Christ, and they will no longer halt between two opinions: they will be persuaded, beyond a doubt, that the pure will of God has, in these last ages of the world, been revealed to mankind by Jesus Christ; and that an atonement for their sins has been made by his death: they will be convinced,

that

that the part of the Bible, which we call the New Testament, is the record of that pure will, the sure evidence of our title to immortality, the blessed pledge of God's renewed acceptance of his creatures, and the charter of our salvation. They will no longer be exposed to the endless solicitation of those petty difficulties, which are apt to disturb the ill-grounded hopes of the uninformed and unreflecting Christian. Instead of minutely comparing one scruple with another, their steady confidence in the oracles of God will oppose to all their difficulties and scruples the combined force of their many and great wants of a Redeemer, and the powerful external evidences of redemption.

III. In the present day, a sincere enquirer after truth cannot be at a loss for external aids to lead him to conviction. We have lately seen a view of the evidences of Christianity, displayed with uncommon clearness of arrangement, and felicity of illustration; which, while it communicates, even to the most learned, new aspects of this ever laboured subject, with ample instruction to the unlearned, and consolation to the humble but doubting Christian, at the same time cannot fail, by its simplicity, candour, and strength of argument, to interest and convince the impartial reasoning Deist: a production, which from

these

these great and various merits, we may hope, has done essential service to the cause of Christianity.

It cannot then be from any defect of external evidence, that our modern philosophers deny or doubt the truth of Christianity. No: it is an unconsciousness of their want of a Redeemer that obstructs the light of the Gospel; it is the vanity of a disputatious temper; the hardness of an unhumbled heart; the opposing interests of a worldly spirit. In short, it is the repugnance and delusion of an unregenerated mind, that blinds them against the plainest and most obvious conclusions. While we describe, however, the "root," and deplore the cause of unbelief in others, we refuse not to "give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in us."

An hardy adventurer in philosophy of our own times, a philosopher of the new school, has assaulted Christianity with objections, which he has the presumption to suppose, will effect its demolition.

1. He considers the visible book of nature, as the only book of Divine Revelation.

2. He

2. He renounces the belief of every thing that is not submitted to the senses.

3. The New Testament is, in his estimation, a collection of unsubstantiated hearsay.

4. And, what we call Revelation, is no Revelation, in his judgment; because (he affirms) it reveals nothing, with which men were not already acquainted.

Upon these several topics, Reverend Brethren, I shall offer you my sentiments, as an earnest of my wish, to contribute with you, towards arming the minds of our unlearned fellow Christians, against the pernicious tendency of a work, which has been disseminated, with much mischievous industry, among the lower classes of the people.

The general ground of the external evidences of Christianity, it is superfluous for me to enter upon, as they have been so amply and perspicuously displayed, in the admirable view before-mentioned. I shall confine myself chiefly to the first part of the age of reason; (for, to the second, a most able reply has been given, by a prelate of very distinguished talents) and especially, to the position above stated;

stated; because the first, from which the rest originate, is brought forward, by the author, in his summary of the first part, no doubt, as the most striking and forcible of his objections.

1. The author considers the book of nature, as the only book of Revelation. He asserts that, " The idea, or belief of a word of God, existing in print, or in writing, or in speech, is inconsistent with itself, from the want of an universal language; and the defects and injuries, to which all human languages and writings must be subject."

The apparent difficulty in this objection, consists in the misconception of the venerable title, given to the Sacred Writings; which the objector understands, as if it meant the very articulate sounds uttered by the Deity. The " word of God," is *the will of God*, expressed *in the words of man*. The organ, by which God's communications with inspired men are imparted from them to others, is that, which he has appointed to be the instrument and vehicle of our knowledge of almost all subjects, which it concerns us to know; and is, indeed, the prerogative of our rational nature. The expression of God's will, in human language, was an accommodation to the capacities of his creatures; and

and was, therefore, unavoidably subject to the common accidents of humanity. Why, then, should we be surprised, if the sacred volume, containing the revealed will of God, has sustained the casualties and injuries, which, in some degree, affect all other human writings? God, indeed, might have revealed his will altogether by inspiration; and, by a perpetual miracle, have exempted man from all possibility of error: but that would have left no trial of his free agency; no room for the elective faculties of his boasted reason; and would have cancelled all grounds, and all distinctions, of merit or demerit; that is, God might have changed the whole condition of man's nature, in order to prevent the exercise of those faculties, which distinguish him as a rational, though fallible creature, from all others, below or above him.

If it should be urged, that the possibility of wilful alteration is a proof, that no human language can be the word of God, or the vehicle of his will; it might as well be objected, that human reason cannot be the gift of God, because it is capable of being perverted to the most unreasonable, most pernicious purposes. The mistakes of copyists, and the errors of translators, will excite no alarm in the mind

of any one, who recollects, how difficult it is, in many cases, to explain and translate the visible word of God. The creation is, indeed, an ever-existing original, which all men can read; but it is often in a stile, which is obscure to the wisest human intellect. What, but this difficulty in explaining "the visible word of God," could have produced the many discordant systems of the universe which have prevailed, and revolutions of philosophy, which have taken place, from the days of Pythagoras, to those of Newton? What was the origin of idolatry, but the misconstruction of the visible unwritten word? And, which is still more to our purpose, what has corrected those errors of idolatrous worship, but the propagation of Christianity, by the light of the written word of God? (c)

2. This unbeliever "renounces the belief of every thing which is not submitted to the senses."

On other occasions, men of this description can readily enough perceive, how little way this evidence extends. Yet here they appeal to the example of St. Thomas; and demand to be satisfied, as he was, by the evidence of the senses. But the Apostle's doubts, and their apostacy, rest on very different

ferent grounds. St. Thomas, like his brethren, had seen, heard, and lived with our Saviour; had, probably, beheld him on the cross; and, therefore, possessing the same means of judging for himself, with Christ's other disciples and friends, he might naturally suppose, he should possess the same evidence. But what title has our infidel philosopher to any aids of præternatural illumination, denied to Christians since the age of the Apostles? Christ, no doubt, foresaw the perverseness of such incredulous gainsayers; and has therefore left, in one of the most striking of his parables, a declaration sufficiently explicit, that no external evidence was to be expected beyond the scriptures; to which, however, he promised, to those who should sincerely ask for it, the assistance of this holy spirit; and has added, in the case of St. Thomas, what his future disciples were, to apply to their own consolation; that "blessed should those be, who should not see him, and yet should believe." Our philosopher forgets, that without confidence and trust, which are but different degrees of faith, even the common intercourse of society could not possibly subsist; that faith, in its very nature, must be founded on trust; and is (according to the excellent definition of St. Paul) "the evidence of things not seen," the belief of things not submitted to the senses.

3. Unreasonable, as I hope I have shewn to be this disbelief of the "invisible things of God," yet, in consequence of this prejudice, the New Testament is treated, by this unbeliever, as a collection of unsubstantiated hearsay, that "did not exist, till more than three hundred years after the supposed time of Christ."

The extreme ignorance, betrayed by such an assertion, would exclude it from notice, if it had not appeared in a publication, most assiduously circulated among a part of our fellow Christians, who, from want of education, are incapable of judging of its falsehood. It is our duty, therefore, to inform and remind them, on all occasions, that we have the fullest evidence, that the writings of the New Testament not only existed, but were publickly read and expounded, in the religious assemblies of the Christians, as early as the middle of the second century; and that the custom was then an established custom. We have also very probable evidence, that these writings were collected into a volume, within forty or fifty years after the time of the Apostles. We have, moreover, from these very writings, so amply authenticated, I will not say unquestionable, or unquestioned (for, in the conflict of opinions, the strongest

strongest proofs are the most likely to be questioned) but, I think, invincible evidence, that a very valuable part of these writings, I mean the epistles of St. Paul, were acknowledged, read, and appealed to, by the other Apostles as in Scripture.

If to this evidence you add the testimony of Heretics and Heathens, from Cerinthus to Julian, who, by their invectives against the whole of Christianity, or opposition to particular doctrines, have left an involuntary and unsuspected attestation to the authenticity of the New Testament, and the prevailing belief of Christians, from the very age of the Apostles to the fourth century: if, lastly, you present to the attention of your Congregations the combined strength of the several branches of evidence for the authenticity of the Scriptures, you may arm them (by God's Grace) "with a shield of faith," sufficient to "quench all the fiery darts" of the most insidious or virulent of its enemies. You may convince them, that, if they suffer themselves to be misled by the doubts and objections of Infidels, it will not be from the want of adequate proof of the truth of Christianity, but from their inattention, or their want of feeling.

This latter circumstance, indeed, this want of feeling for the great interests they have at stake in every thing which concerns their improvement in Religion; this ignorance of their spiritual condition; this unconsciousness of their spiritual necessities, or whatever else we may term it, which is so observable in all ranks of life; whether it originate in the love of pleasure, or the effect of worldly cares and habits, is a most pregnant source of scepticism and unbelief, as will appear further, from a consideration of the last of the four objections against Revelation and the Bible, mentioned above.

4. The Infidel asks, what is it we have learned from Revealed Religion?

Such a question coud arise only from the most callous insensibility to the advantages of Christianity. We have learned, what from the light of nature the wisest Heathen was never able to discover, the absolute certainty of a future state. There is nothing in the physical properties of body to lead to the expectation of a future life: nothing in the moral goodness of man to intitle him to future reward(c*). The best men have fallen very short of the perfect rectitude of the moral law. So far from deserving reward, there

there is nothing which coud give them a hope of exemption from punishment, but the merciful grace of God: And that hope they derive from Revealed Religion. The philosopher may trust, perhaps, with confidence, in the certainty of a future state; but this confidence he has acquired, without knowing it, from the very Revelation which he rejects.

The Infidel asks, "What has the Bible taught us?"

Nothing can betray a greater distance from the spirit of the Gospel, than the arrogant vanity which prompted this question. Any one who studies the Bible, especially the New Testament, if he does not read it with "eyes which see not," may learn what the philosopher will be very unwilling to acknowledge, that the wisdom of the world, which vaunts itself in its own powers, is folly and sin before God: that it was not to the wise and prudent, in their own sight, that God revealed himself, but to the poor, the humble, and the teachable; he who thinks himself rich in intellectual endowments, and "increased with goodness," and that "he has need of nothing," of no merit but his own, may perhaps learn, that he is "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." He who has been

accus-

accustomed, with great self-complacency, to contemplate the dignity of human nature, may learn, that man is infinitely degraded from his original state; that he is a fallen, corrupt, sinful creature; in the abuse of his rational faculties, and the neglect of the means of grace, without excuse; without any claim to God's favour; without any grounds of recommendation to God's mercy; without the means of redemption in himself; and (but for the goodness of God, and the grace of Christ) altogether without hope. (c**)

But what has the Bible taught us?

It is this ignorance of self, and the self-sufficiency which accompanies it, that create a perfect inaptitude to receive the truths of the Gospel. No one can heartily believe the Gospel, who is not predisposed to believe in a Saviour. To believe in a Saviour, he must entertain a deep sense of the depravity of sin; he must know his danger of not being saved; he must be convinced, that he cannot be saved by himself; he must be conscious of his great want of a Saviour, and must be very anxious to secure his salvation: with these dispositions, he will readily close with the conditions offered him by the Gospel, the

conditions

conditions of acceptance through faith in Christ. But how is he to obtain these predispositions? Not from nature, not from natural wisdom, nor the world's philosophy. They are too apt to carry the mind in a very contrary direction; and to lead to self-honour, self-applause, and to any thing rather than to self-humiliation. "The natural man re-"ceiveth not the things of the spirit of God; neither can he "know them, because they are spiritually discerned." How then is he to obtain these predispositions? From Revelation only, with the concurrence of God's grace. "Faith cometh "by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." From the Gospel alone will he form just views of human nature and himself; from the Gospel alone will he learn to raise to its proper height, the standard of religious and moral duty, and to lower the measure of human merit. But these dispositions being once derived from Scripture, and confirmed by a rational examination of Scripture evidences, and enlightened by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, he receives most cordially, and most thankfully, the great truths of the Gospel—"Christ's power to save," and the "sinner's hopes of pardon." He now, for the first time, perceives, how "he that believeth in the Son of God, hath "the witness in himself;" and is experimentally convinced, that an unbeliever's doubts arise, not from defect of evidence, but from want of feeling.

IV. I have now, Reverend Brethren, assigned my reasons for thinking that the growth of Scepticism and Infidelity in the Christian world, is to be ascribed to an almost universal lukewarmness and indifference in Christians, respecting the essentials of their religion, the peculiar grounds of their faith, of their hopes, and their fears, rather than to the ability, the arguments, the zeal, or the perseverance of the enemies of Christianity. And if this be the case, it concerns us on our own account, on the account of those for whose instruction we are responsible, to inform ourselves and them, to the best of our power, whence arises this unchristian lukewarmness, in order that we may exert every preventive and corrective care, to counteract the cause or causes which operate so injuriously to our eternal interests. Upon the most diligent view of the subject, I am persuaded, that lukewarmness in religion is, in a great measure, to be ascribed to the following causes :

1. A want of religious impressions formed in the earliest teachable years of childhood by domestic instruction.

2. A neglect of religious knowledge at school.

3. An infrequency in the pulpit of those subjects which constitute the peculiar doctrines of Christianity.

4. And

4. And lastly. A neglect of other means necessary to promote the general diffusion and advancement of religious information. I shall content myself at present, with having mentioned the two first, that I may dwell more largely on those which immediately concern us.

In the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, are we to look for the topics which have the strongest hold on the affections; which most interest our hopes and our fears; our fears of that Omniscient Being, "in whose sight, no man "living shall be justified;" before whose awful justice, the merit of our best actions is less than nothing; our hopes, and our trust, in that gracious and merciful Providence, which has wrought for man an atonement, that affords encouragement, hope, and consolation, to the repentant and regenerate mind, even "of the chief of sinners."

The doctrines which distinguish a Christian from a Jew, a Mahometan, or a Heathen, should be a Christian's constant study; and (as it is your duty to teach, what is every man's concern to know) it is incumbent upon you to present them frequently to your congregations, to impress them on their minds with all the energy which you can derive from language, with all the affection which

they are calculated to inspire; especially when considered as subjects of stated and appropriate meditation. But you should not confine them to the great solemnities, which are consecrated to their commemoration. Every principle of Christian duty, every exercise of faith, of hope, and of charity, in all its branches; every motive to the love of God, and of our neighbour, is so connected with the great religious doctrines of the Gospel, that you can never want opportunities of introducing them into your discourses, and of shewing how much the due discharge of a Christian's moral duty depends upon the liveliness and stability of his faith. But if the knowledge and application of the leading doctrines of Christianity be necessary for all, for the educated, and uneducated, how peculiarly so is the preaching of them for the latter; who are unable to assist and enlarge the instructions, which they receive at church, by private reading. To this part of your congregations, the poor, the aged, the uneducated, and the ignorant, I wish to direct your most active, most benevolent attention. To them was the Gospel first preached: to them were its glad tidings first proclaimed. The poor too compose the greatest part of most congregations; an additional reason for adapting public discourses to them in particular. They deserve all your care; and whatever be the success of your

labours,

labours, the approbation of your own minds, in the conscientious discharge of your duty to them, will, no doubt, reward all your pains.

As a mean of facilitating the religious instructions of the poor, I need not use many words in recommending to you the studying their temporal, as well as their spiritual wants. Our heavenly Master, who "went about doing good," has left us his example to direct and encourage us. When his Apostles were sent into the world to preach the Gospel, they were endowed, not with miraculous faculties of useless power, but with the benign gifts of healing; both as a testimony of their divine mission, and as a means of relieving the distresses of their fellow-creatures. Diligence in the same truly Christian duties should be the test to your own minds of sincerity in your profession. It will certainly contribute much to the persuasion of your people, that your apparent concern for their spiritual good, is not the mere effect of professional obligation. Many benevolent minds suffer their excellent dispositions for doing good, to remain unemployed in the great service of Christian charity, not for want of means, or of objects, but for want of knowing what good *may* be done, within their own sphere, and *how*. The latter part of this century has produced

duced many very useful publications, for the benefit of the poor; in which, even the least opulent of my audience, will sometimes meet with materials for their benevolence, which they may adopt or vary, according to their means (D).

For, whatever be our diligence in studying the temporal wants of our fellow-creatures, our means of relieving them, will vary much with local and other circumstances. We may not all be equally intrusted with the gifts of fortune, as they are called; but of "the bread of life" we have an inexhaustible store, equally within the reach of us all; and a "well of "water springing up to eternal life." To the distribution of this spiritual food, we are bound to devote our best faculties; and it should be the aim of our earnest wishes, the subject of our most ardent prayers, the end of our most zealous endeavours, so to employ our means for distributing this food, that both they, who receive, and we, who distribute, may have reason to "rejoice together".

Besides the three great ordinary means of spiritual improvement, Public Prayer, Preaching, and Catechizing, there are many others which may be made very instrumental in promoting religious knowledge among the poor.

1. The

1. The tried advantages of Sunday schools are too striking to need recommendation; and I have grounds for believing, from what I have seen and heard, that in forwarding the benefits of this species of education, the Clergy of this Diocese have not been behind its warmest promoters. There are, however, some peculiar circumstances in the condition of the poor of the two Counties, of which this Diocese consists, which appear to require an extension of this charity; and which merit the most serious attention, both of the Laity and the Clergy. In times of public difficulty, such as the dearth of provisions, we have too often and too recently discovered a tendency to discontent and disorder, not to be anxious for the application of some effectual remedy, for so alarming an evil. For my own part, I am persuaded, that no remedy but the radical one, of religious education and instruction, can be effectual. Sunday schools may be made most useful instruments in this desirable work; and if, with the institution of Sunday schools, a proportionable number of chapels were to be erected, in some of the largest and most destitute parishes of these northern counties, we might not despair of seeing the happiest changes introduced into the disposition and conduct of those numerous men, who, on the occasions alluded to, shewed themselves

themselves most averse to sobriety and order. To cultivate the moral and religious improvement of this very useful part of our labouring poor, is an object of such consequence to the opulent proprietors of estates and mines, (indeed, to the whole community) as well as to the spiritual welfare of the poor themselves, that I cannot but foster a hope, that an evil, so deeply felt, and so much lamented, as their present unhappy and pitiable ignorance, may at length find a cure, in the united wisdom and benevolence of the parties most nearly concerned.

2. The benefits to be derived from Sunday education, may be very greatly assisted, by the dispersion of small cheap tracts, on religious and moral duties. We know and feel, what mighty changes in political sentiment and conduct, have been, by such means, effected. Why should the friends of religion, suffer themselves to be surpassed, in activity and zeal, by the authors of sedition and anarchy? There already, fortunately, exists in the society for promoting Christian knowledge, a storehouse, which will abundantly supply the well-disposed with helps for instructing the poor in the principles of Christianity. We possess, also, another valuable resource, (for which we are indebted to a female writer, whose extraordinary talents have

have been uniformly and strenuously employed, in the cause of religion and virtue) in a late institution, which is admirably calculated to enlighten the minds, and direct the conduct, of the rising generation of the poor.

3. By these aids, the young, and all who have learned to read, may be infinitely benefited; but, in most country parishes, there is a considerable proportion of the poor, who, from want of early education, cannot partake of the advantages to be derived from reading. An old man, who, from age and incapacity for labour, finds himself disengaged from this world, and approaching every day nearer to the next, and yet is shut out, in a great degree, from the light and consolations of the gospel, by his inability to read the word of God, and good books, is an object of real pity; and, to relieve such necessity as this, is, indeed, one of the highest acts of Christian charity. The parish church, it is true, is accessible to him; and, if he be well disposed, he will be more diligent in frequenting it: But we all know, how difficult it often is to confine the mind to the proper object of prayer, even with the assistance of the written form. How much more difficult must it be for him, whose vacant mind is open to the intrusion of every vain and idle thought? And, with all the advantages of public worship, he will

still have many unoccupied, tedious, and solitary hours, which it would be happy for him, if he could convert to the service of eternity. Much, I conceive, might be done by occasional conference with him at his own dwelling, concerning the state of his faith, his hopes, and his views of futurity. And, if this conference were accompanied with the reading to him some portion of Scripture, or of some easy tract on the truth and promises of the Gospel, his Minister would do him an act of inestimable kindness. If you coud advance one step beyond this, and induce the aged poor to assist one another, and form little societies in a large, or one society in a small parish, at which those who are readers might read to those who are not, it would be bringing your poor to a most desirable and edifying state of spiritual communion; such as would contribute very greatly to their comfort during the short period of remaining life, as well as at the awful hour of death.

Next to the old, I would earnestly recommend to your care and assistance the infirm. Times of sickness are peculiarly favourable for religious impressions. These are golden opportunities, which, if properly employed, might redound to the everlasting happiness of the sick. But to produce the desired effect, the mind of the sick person should

should be in sufficient vigour. He should be capable of taking a clear and steady retrospect of his past life; and of forming deliberate and determined resolutions for the conduct of his remaining days. But the sick, and their friends, are generally accustomed to wait too long before they send for the Minister. In many such cases, the funeral service might be used with almost as much propriety as the office for the sick. This religious duty is, probably, often delayed, partly from tenderness (a false tenderness) to the sick; partly, from an unwillingness to give what they might fear would be unnecessary trouble to the Minister. It tends, therefore, greatly to improve this season of affliction, where the Minister anticipates the call. Such visits of neighbourly inquiry might, I presume, easily be converted into occasions of religious instruction. The earlier visits might be allotted both to general and appropriate conversation and instruction; the office for the sick being reserved for cases of danger.

These are the mollia tempora fandi, in which they, may, with most benefit, be reminded of their omissions of duty to God, their neglect of secret and family prayer, of Church, and especially of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and these are the best opportunities of urging them to renew

their covenant with God, and their fixed resolutions to pass the residue of this life with a constant view to the next. If, by God's blessing, they recover, they should be reminded again and again, that, of all the means of Grace, and all the helps to a saving religious knowledge, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is that from which most benefit is to be expected, if it be received with a proper sense of the engagements which are there entered into, and with a determination to abide by them. This, therefore, is the great supper to which guests of all descriptions should be earnestly invited; the rich, the poor, "the halt, the maimed, "the blind:" no importunity should be omitted that could bring them from "the streets and lanes, the highways and "hedges," and, as it were, "compel them to come in" to this banquet of mercy and Christian charity. But all who recover from sickness, should be more especially pressed to the receiving of the Holy Communion; women who have returned thanks for their safe delivery; the old, the young; those particularly who have been lately confirmed. If the rite of Confirmation has had any of that effect which it is always my wish and endeavour to produce, the two offices of Confirmation and the Lord's Supper, have so near a connection with each other, that it would be happy for them, if the Minister who proposes them for the one, should induce

duce them to attend the other, the earliest opportunity after Confirmation, by representing the participation of the Lord's Supper as the practical exercise of that responsibility which they have taken upon themselves; and, in fact, as the complete assumption and ratification of their Christian title and engagements. If this connection between the two rites was always held up to them, and they were taught to look upon the one (among other considerations) as an introduction to the other, it would supply them with a plain intelligible principle of duty, which might give them lasting and useful impressions of both.

V. The different means, Reverend Brethren, which I have recommended to you for the diffusion and advancement of religious knowledge among the poor, however desirable for all parishes, are not, I am sensible, equally practicable in all. The success of your endeavours must, in some degree, be effected by the peculiar circumstances of your respective parishes. To those circumstances, I have no doubt, you think it your duty to proportion your exertions. I will only urge, as an additional motive, to such as are apt to be discouraged by unpromising appearances, that they may do much more good than they are aware of; and, at the worst, they may be well content with the reflection,

reflection, that they are doing all the good in their power. Whatever pains they may take, it is not in themselves to command success; though "Paul may plant, and Apollos "water, it is God that giveth the increase."

Very much, however, will depend on your personal residence; and also, in large parishes, on the sufficiency of well encouraged assistance, to co-operate with your pastoral and charitable endeavours. Liberal assistance to your fellow-labourers in the vineyard, ought always to be held a just and primary duty. Christ's first commission to his Apostles, belongs to us all, "freely ye have received, "freely give." The ease and comfortable situation of your curates, will prove a powerful instrument in promoting the religious improvement of the poor. It will, probably, in most cases, relieve them from the necessity of resorting, for a subsistence, to employments incompatible with the leisure requisite for the proper discharge of their parochial duties. The impression of your liberality to them, will, in the minds of your parishioners, strongly confirm their persuasion of your solicitude for the general good. But earnestly as I recommend the utmost liberality in your power, towards your curates, I should be sorry to be so misunderstood, as if it was my intention to advise any remuneration dispro-

disproportioned to the nature and value of your benefices. By no means. That was never in the contemplation of the legislature, in committing to the Diocesan, the power specified in the late Curate's Act. It is very difficult to prescribe a rule that shall reach all cases. Yet, in the general, I may venture to propose, that when a benefice is large, even if the duty be not great, the value of the benefice, and not the nature of the duty, should be the measure of the Curate's stipend: but where the duty is great, even in benefices that are not valuable, there the extent of the duty, rather than the value of the benefice, should be the rule: yet, even here, not without respect to the general circumstances of the incumbent. The difficulty, however, even in the latter case, is obvious: it might, I conceive, in most cases, be easily adjusted, by an amicable conference between the incumbent and curate. If, notwithstanding, further reference should be unavoidable, the parties may rest assured of my deciding the difference, with the strictest impartiality.

VI. I have now, Reverend Brethren, laid before you the several subjects, which I thought it my duty to submit to your consideration. You will have observed, that these subjects all rank themselves under the two main principles

of

of Faith and Charity. Indeed, in however great a variety of views, a Christian's duty be examined, they will all, whatever be his situation in life, resolve themselves into cases of religious and moral duty, into principles of devotion and benevolence, into acts of duty to God, or to his neighbour. For, in truth, genuine Christianity is no other than THE UNION OF PURE DEVOTION, WITH UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE. The genuine records of pure devotion, I have endeavoured to vindicate, from the attacks of infidelity, ignorance, and self-conceit, in the first part of what I have addressed to you; and, in the subsequent observations, I have exemplified some leading principles of benevolence, as they apply more especially to your professional duties.

The eventful period, in which the Supreme Governor of the Universe has placed us, affords an ample exercise of all our faith, and all our charity. It is distinguished by so many striking interpositions of Providence, as must leave us without excuse, if we suffer it to pass unnoticed and unimproved. What various urgent calls have we on our gratitude to Heaven? 1. For the signal exemption, which we enjoy, from the calamities of confusion and anarchy, which have convulsed the rest of Europe. 2. For the fortunate issue of certain conjunctures, which wore the most formidable and disastrous

trous aspect; by which we have seen danger converted into safety, and mutiny into discipline. 3. For the opportunity, which God has afforded us, in the protection and support of our national enemies in exile, of displaying that virtue, to which he has promised so large a portion of his favour. 4. And, lastly, for the continuance of that invaluable life, to which the government of these kingdoms is entrusted. A life, the exemplary virtues of which, if they do not awe the restless, the turbulent, and the seditious into attachment and loyalty, have done what is more than equivalent, have assembled around the throne, all the energy of the constitution and laws, invigorated by the firmness of a watchful magistracy, and the fidelity of a grateful people; prepared equally to repel the insidious arts of secret traiterous corruption, and the open violence of domestic tumult, or hostile invasion.

I coud here gladly dwell on the abundant and delightful subject, of God's mercies to us; and on the active and fruitful gratitude, which we owe in return for them. I coud willingly expatiate, on the humility that becomes us, as a nation, and as individuals, for the iniquities which God has mercifully overlooked; and the sins, which he has forborne to punish. I coud wish to enlarge further, on the

necessity and means of guarding our own faith, and that of our flocks, in this "age of reason" and false philosophy, by the most diligent study of the Scriptures in their original languages; of Scripture evidences; and of the great peculiar doctrines of our religion; and, lastly, on the duty of improving the opportunity which Providence has granted us, of cultivating those extensive principles of charity, which tend, if not to unite, at least to harmonize, the different branches of the Christian Church. But I have already detained you longer than usual. I should have feared too long, had I not thought that much was due to the topics on which I have insisted, and something to the more than ordinary[E] length of time which has elapsed since our last meeting. May that gracious Saviour, in whose Church we all, in the course of God's providence, have been appointed Ministers, enable us to discharge our several duties, to the glory of his name, the edification of the Christian Church, and the Salvation of our own Souls!

NOTES.

NOTES.

(A) SECOND Alcibiades of Plato.

Socrates. ἀναγκαιον ϵν ϵξι περιμϵνϵιν, ἑως αν τις μαθῃ ὡς δα προς θϵως και προς ανθρωπϵς διακϵισθαι.

To this Alcibiades answers,

Ποτϵ ϵν παρϵσαι ὁ χρονος ὁυτος, ω Σωκατϵς, και τις ὁ παιδϵυσων; ἡδισα γαρ αν μοι δοκω ιδϵιν τϵτον τον ανθρωπον, τις ϵστιν.

(B) By the pure will of God, I mean the spiritual nature of the Religion of Christ, as distinguished from the ritual observances of the old dispensation.

(C) The author of the first part of the Age of Reason has a violent objection to the terms *Revelation* and *Word of God*, as applied to the Scriptures. 1. He denies the name of Revelation, to " the recital of any thing, of which *man*

" has

" has been the actor or witness." 2. He alledges, that the term can only be applied to " something which God " reveals of his *will* to man. And, 3. asserts, that any " thing revealed, is revelation, *only to the perſon to whom it* " *is made.*"

These are arbitrary interpretations of the term *Revelation*, fabricated to answer his own purpose. They are certainly not justified by the legitimate and grammatical power of the term *revelatio*, or ανακαλυψις, which mean merely " the discovery of what was before concealed or un- " known." 1. If the primitive *history of mankind*, though it be a recital of transactions, in which man was an actor and witness, has been, by any means, totally lost to the world, a true narrative of such history, is as much an act of *revelation*, according to the real meaning of the word, and requires the aid of inspiration, as much as the prediction of future events. 2. There is nothing in the term Revelation, which limits it to the enunciation of the *will* of God, in the sense of injunctions or *commands*, or to the person to whom any revelation is made. I have defined the " *word of God*," to be " the will of God, expressed in " the words of man ;" not as if it were confined to a verbal declaration of God's commands, like the Decalogue, or any other

other direct and plain injunctions. For the will of God is not less seen in the record of his dealings with the Israelites, and other nations and individuals, than in the two tables of the law of Moses. 3. Much less does *Revelation* cease to be Revelation to every other person, except to him to whom it is made. For what was revealed yesterday, cannot be unrevealed to-day. What was revealed to Moses, is equally revealed to us, because equally undiscoverable without the aid of inspiration.

I have said enough, I should hope, to show the futility of the objections to the term Revelation, as applied to the Scriptures. If this writer's arguments against the application of the term, were of any real weight, we might supersede the trouble of refutation, by conceding to him all that he asserts. For the divine original and authority of the Scriptures, are not, in the smallest degree, affected by the propriety or impropriety of a mere title, which is extraneous to the writings themselves, and was not affixed to the sacred volume by its authors. The Bible might justly be called, *the Word of God*, or *the Book of God*, by way of eminence, in the sense of *divine* word, or *sacred* writings, as the mountain of God, the man of God, &c. If there was no other propriety in the application of the terms

Word

Word of God, to the Scriptures, this consideration, would alone shew the weakness of deistical cavils.

(c*) I would by no means disparage below its real value the argument from the light of nature for a future state, grounded upon the consideration of the unlikelihood of those who endeavour to serve God, and those who pass their lives in a wilful disobedience to his will, being treated by him alike hereafter. To the Heathens, who were without the Gospel, it was of little use; for it was never able thoroughly to settle their minds in the belief of a future state. And it is of less value to us, who possess the Gospel, and to whom Christ has brought life and immortality to light. In the defectiveness of the argument, I see sure grounds for the necessity of redemption by Christ. In the defence, however, of Religion in general, we should "become all "things to all men," if by chance we may win some;" and, therefore, we ought not to throw away the argument we can derive from the light of Nature, but rather make the utmost use of it that we reasonably can, in hopes that some readers may be led further by it, to study and embrace the surer evidence of the Gospel.

(d**) To the question, what had the Bible taught us? we may briefly answer: Man had forgot his true origin and end;

end; the Scriptures reveal it. He had lost the true knowledge of God; the Scriptures declare it. He had defaced the image of God; the Scriptures restore it. He had not the knowledge and true use of prayer; the Scriptures teach him how to pray. He was destitute of a competent rule of duty to God and man; the Scriptures put him in possession of it. And, lastly, sunk in all the corruption of worldly-mindedness, he was totally lost to a true sense of his spiritual condition; the Scriptures alone, (but especially that part of them, called the New Testament) instruct him how to judge of his condition and fitness for the next life. They who do not feel the force of this last consideration, will, it is to be feared, not be satisfied with any other argument for the importance of the Scriptures; and they who do, will want no other.

(D) Excellent hints may be derived from the truly philanthropic writings of Count Rumford, and Mr. Jonas Hanway; from tracts in the Cheap Repository; from a very valuable pamphlet written by the Reverend G. Bouyer, Prebendary of Durham, intitled, "An Address to the Public, on the Propriety of establishing Schools for Spinning, or other Work, and appointing Teachers in each Parish, with a View to the better Relief and Employment of the Poor;"

Poor," publiſhed by F. and C. Rivington, St. Paul's Church Yard; Mr. Bernard's Account of a Cottage and Garden near Tadcaster; the Rev. Dr. Stonehouse's Tracts; and the Report of the Society for increasing the Comforts, and bettering the Condition of the Poor. I cannot conclude this note better than with an extract from Dr. Stonehouse's "Conſiderations of ſome particular Sins, and on the *Means* "*of doing Good*, bodily and ſpiritually."

"VARIOUS MEANS OF DOING GOOD BODILY AND SPIRITUALLY.

MEANS OF DOING GOOD BODILY.

"1. BY giving to the poor bread, coals, ſhoes, ſtockings, linen, coats, or gowns, which may be bought much cheaper than *they* can buy them.

2. By paying their houſe-rent, or part of it.

3. By ſending them wine, herb teas, or ſpoon meats, when ſick, and ſometimes proper dinners on their recovery, ſuitable to their weak ſtate.

4. By paying their apothecary's bill, or part of it.

5. By giving rakes, prongs, or ſpades, to day-labourers; or ſome implements of their trade to poor induſtrious workmen.

6. By ſeldom giving *money*, unleſs to thoſe who live at a diſtance, and then we ſhould be well aſſured that their caſe is truly ſtated, and that we cannot relieve them by any other method.

7. By ſubſcribing to *an Infirmary*, where we may procure that relief for ſome real objects of compaſſion, which they cannot obtain *elſewhere;*

where; and without which, perhaps, they must *perish*, or remain hopeless of any cure, and burdens to society.

8. By discouraging idleness in man, woman, or child; and by contriving work for those who are unemployed.

9. By defending *the poor* against oppression; especially *such of them* as are too often most grievously oppressed by *hard-hearted* parish officers, who have the power over them.

MEANS OF DOING GOOD SPIRITUALLY.

1. BY giving away good books, especially bibles and common prayer books; and enquiring, whether those to whom we give them come constantly to church.

2. By lending, or recommending suitable books; and afterwards, by examining what *use* has been made of them.

3. By putting children to school; and seeing occasionally what *improvement* they have made.

4. By learning some, who are intended for Apprenticeships, to write, and to cast Accounts.

5. By promoting religious societies, sunday schools, and houses of industry; and, if we can, by superintending them.

6. By talking seriously and affably with children and servants, at any time or place, when a proper opportunity offers.

7. By adding one or more religious sentences, or texts of scripture, in any letters to our friends, where they can be introduced with propriety.

8. By visiting the sick, and comforting or admonishing them: and more especially by pointing out the fall of man,

and redemption by Chriſt as the solid and *only* foundation of *present* peace, and *final* salvation. (1. Cor. iii. 10.)

9. By dispersing printed or written SLIPS of paper, against particular sins, as sabbath-breaking, swearing, &c. in order to be given away occasionally, or enclosed in a letter, or put into a book, or dropt in any part of the house, where the reproved would be likely to meet with it, provided there would be an impropriety in giving it him ourselves. This may possibly be the means of reforming *some*, who have been accustomed to the sin therein reproved.

10. By inculcating (as the SOUL, like the BODY, requires *daily* nourishment and support) the important duty of *secret* and *family prayer*, as the ROOT of all moral and religious principles."

(1) Occasioned by the dissolution of Parliament, in 1796.